

County Seats

by
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“County Seats”, as a category, was established in 1935 by Charles N. (Doc) Reed, a pharmacist from Indianapolis, Indiana. He was the one who set the standard for the kind of cover that was needed in this particular category. He decreed that any 20-strike cover that had the name of the city and state on the front of the cover would be the kind of cover you were looking for in this category. It couldn't have more than one town listed, and it should not say “one half mile south”, or “two miles north of...” because then that would put the business outside the county seat city limits; that criteria is still observed today. He was President of RMS in 1958, and to my knowledge no one knows what happened to his collection.

The total number of county seats fluctuates from time to time, but now it appears from the listings I have that there are 3,068 Counties and 3,076 County Seats. It's not an easy category--some are next to impossible to get. Try to find one from Charles City, Virginia, or Mentone, Texas. There are quite a few more like this, and to find a cover from those towns that's not an Americana and not a Kurt Frier salesman cover, to date, has been impossible.

Ed Perkins' “Americana” are excluded by most collectors with the hope of eventually replacing them. The reason for this is that a good number of them were never ordered by the advertiser in that county seat, or in fact paid for by Perkins before their distribution, or were never even known to exist by the advertiser until they were shown the cover. I can personally say that I visited the Americana advertiser from Huntsville, Tennessee; Knoxville, Georgia; and Charles City, Virginia, and can tell you all for a fact that either they were aware of the cover, but did not buy them from Perkins or never knew that the cover existed until I showed it to them. Because of this kind of thing happening, most county seat collectors do not accept an Americana as an authentic cover from a county seat.

Another example is Kurt Frier, a Superior Match Company salesman from Brownsville, Texas. He was a very pleasant and nice collector to know and sold a lot of his customers' covers to collectors back in the 1960's. However, he issued covers from such difficult county seats in Texas as: San Diego, Mentone, Sarita,

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Loving, and Montague--none of which are authentic covers. Yet, he put his name on them with these cities listed on the covers. Yet, he never lived in any of those towns; he never had an office there; and, they were only issued so that the collectors could have something from that town to complete their county-seat collections. That information comes from the individual, himself.

Most states have the same number of counties as there are county seats. However, there are a number of exceptions that deserve mention here. Alaska does not have the county seat form of government. It uses burroughs or judicial districts, and currently we are aware of some 23 burroughs and 4 judicial districts.

Arkansas and Mississippi have several counties that have double county seats--in other words--they have two county seats in one county. Having visited some of those county seats, I've been told that the reason for that was that when the counties were originally laid out, there was some kind of river running through the county, and it was felt that land on each side of the river should have a county seat. To date, that system still exists in both states.

Connecticut abolished the county seat form of government in 1964. They have commissioner's offices which run the "county-type" form of government in that state.

Louisiana does not have any counties. Louisiana calls them "parishes" and "parish seats" and not counties and county seats.

South Dakota is unique in that there are two counties, namely Shannon and Todd, which have no county seat at all. Those counties are unorganized and consist mostly of Indian reservation territory, and that county government is run by an adjoining county. In a number of cases, some county seats have been changed for many different reasons. A lot of collectors save the county seats that were in effect at the time when they started collecting. I started in the 1950's, and since then there have been a number of changes, and yet I still put all of those former county seats in my county seat collection. Some of them that I can recall at the moment that are no longer county seats are: Evening Shade, AK; Hardy, AK; Powhatan, AK; Wewahitchka, FL; Richfield, KS; Princess Anne, VA; and Grantsburg, WI. It's interesting to go to these former county seats and hear the people talk about the political squabbles and fights that took place which brought about the change in the county seat. Several recent changes have been done because the new county seat is more centrally located in that county than the former county seat was. A good example of that is Grantsburg, Wisconsin, which had the county seat moved to Siren, Wisconsin, because the town is centrally located in the middle of the county.

There are two interesting books about county seats that you might like to buy that provide a wealth of information. The first one is The American Counties, Third Edition, by Joseph Nathan Kane, The Scarecrow Press, Inc., Metuchen, NJ; and the second is The Directory of the Cities and Counties and County Seats of the United States, The A.C. Publications, POB 206, McPherson, KS 67460. Both are worth having with your collection.

I hope that the above gives you some insight into a most fascinating category that is one of the most challenging that exists. It is certainly exciting and a lot of fun to go off of the interstate highways and visit county seats that are truly fascinating to learn about. You meet people who go out of their way to try and find book matches for you. If you enjoy courthouses the way I do, each and every one is more unique and beautiful than the last one. Good luck and happy collecting!

[Ed. A summary of the nation's counties and county seats follows on the next page.]

Addendum to County Seat List

Total Counties/Total County Seats

Alabama		67 Counties	67 County Seats	
Alaska	<i>Judicial Districts</i>	0 Counties	0 County Seats	
Arizona		15 Counties	15 County Seats	
Arkansas		75 Counties	85 County Seats	
California		58 Counties	59 County Seats	
Colorado		63 Counties	63 County Seats	
Connecticut	<i>8 Commissioner's Offices</i>	8 Counties	0 County Seats	
Delaware		3 Counties	3 County Seats	
Florida		67 Counties	67 County Seats	
Georgia		159 Counties	159 County Seats	
Hawaii		5 Counties	4 County Seats	
Idaho		44 Counties	44 County Seats	
Illinois		102 Counties	102 County Seats	
Indiana		92 Counties	92 County Seats	
Iowa		99 Counties	99 County Seats	
Kansas		105 Counties	105 County Seats	
Kentucky		120 Counties	120 County Seats	
Louisiana	<i>Parishes</i>	64 Counties	64 County Seats	
Maine		16 Counties	16 County Seats	
Maryland		22 Counties	22 County Seats	
Massachusetts		14 Counties	14 County Seats	
Michigan		83 Counties	83 County Seats	
Minnesota		87 Counties	87 County Seats	
Mississippi		82 Counties	91 County Seats	
Missouri		114 Counties	114 County Seats	
Montana		56 Counties	56 County Seats	
Nebraska		93 Counties	93 County Seats	
Nevada		16 Counties	16 County Seats	
New Hampshire		10 Counties	10 County Seats	
New Jersey		21 Counties	21 County Seats	
New Mexico		33 Counties	33 County Seats	
New York		62 Counties	62 County Seats	
North Carolina		100 Counties	100 County Seats	
North Dakota		53 Counties	53 County Seats	
Ohio		88 Counties	88 County Seats	
Oklahoma		77 Counties	77 County Seats	
Oregon		36 Counties	36 County Seats	
Pennsylvania		67 Counties	67 County Seats	
Rhode Island		5 Counties	5 County Seats	
South Carolina		46 Counties	46 County Seats	
South Dakota		66 Counties	64 County Seats	
Tennessee		95 Counties	95 County Seats	
Texas		254 Counties	254 County Seats	
Utah		29 Counties	29 County Seats	
Vermont		14 Counties	14 County Seats	
Virginia		94 Counties	94 County Seats	
Washington		39 Counties	39 County Seats	
West Virginia		55 Counties	55 County Seats	
Wisconsin		72 Counties	72 County Seats	<i>Total</i>
Wyoming		23 Counties	23 County Seats	<i>3068</i>
				<i>3076</i>